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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000445

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [IR](#) [KU](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAIT ADOPTS MORE VIGOROUS, PUBLIC DEFENSE  
POSTURE; FEW IMPRESSED

REF: A. KUWAIT 431  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 419  
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 358

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary and comment: Kuwait has adopted a more vigorous and public defense posture in the past several months, an indication of the Kuwaiti leadership's rising concern about tensions in the Gulf and desire to project to the Kuwaiti public an image of engagement and preparedness. Kuwait held its first military parade in more than 25 years, approved the deployment of two new U.S. Patriot missile batteries at the main U.S. military base in Kuwait, and hosted an interagency team to assess its critical energy infrastructure security. In addition, Kuwaiti officials have used unusually strong rhetoric and emphasized that "Kuwaiti forces are more than ready to defend the state." This more robust posture comes as Amir Shaykh Sabah meets his Arab counterparts at the Arab summit in Riyadh to discuss, among other issues, a Saudi paper on "enhancing Arab national security and fighting international terrorism." Despite these efforts, most Kuwaitis remain skeptical about their country's defensive readiness and some of the actions, i.e. the parade may have been for domestic consumption during a period of turbulent domestic politics.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Comment: There is little doubt in Kuwait that Gulf security is a function of the U.S. presence and commitment. The skepticism about Kuwaiti military prowess is justified, but it is nonetheless useful that Kuwait remind its people and Iran of the need to be prepared to confront threats. End summary and comment.

Strong Rhetoric...

[1](#)3. (S/NF) On March 7, Kuwait hosted its first military parade since 1981. According to Deputy National Guard Chief Shaykh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, the Amir personally requested the parade to "show the people of Kuwait that we are ready to defend ourselves" (ref C). The parade featured three of Kuwait's recently-acquired Apache helicopters, which Kuwait's Air Force Commander Yousef Al-Otaibi said "display the desire of Kuwait's political and military leadership to provide all the means necessary to protect the nation." Kuwait's Chief of Staff Fahd Al-Amir told press after the parade that "Kuwaiti forces are more than ready to defend the state against any foreign threat to its stability."

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Brigadier General Ahmed Rahmani, Kuwait's Director of Military Operations, delivered a speech at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Conference on Domestic and Foreign Challenges in Bahrain on March 5 in which he called on GCC countries to "endorse a joint national defense strategy aimed

at facing up to foreign threats." Speaking on behalf of Kuwait's Chief of Staff, Rahmani said the GCC should work to "complete the restoration of GCC military capability and consolidate the strength of the Peninsula Shield through agreeing on a joint military strategy aimed at facing up to any challenges between Iran and its Arab neighbors and between Iran and the international community," Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) reported March 6. In a joint press conference with visiting French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy on March 10, Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah used slightly stronger language on Iran than usual, saying, "We see before us a country that now falls under Chapter Seven, and this is a cause for concern because Iran is defying international resolutions."

And Some New Security Measures...

15. (S/NF) Backing up this rhetoric, Kuwait approved the deployment of two new U.S. Patriot missile batteries at Camp Arifjan, the largest U.S. military base in Kuwait. The systems became operational on February 28. In November 2006, Kuwait repositioned its own Patriots missile batteries to face Iran rather than Iraq, a move it had long resisted for fear of provoking Iran. According to regional press reports, on March 21 Kuwait tested an "Egyptian-origin air defense system named Al-Amoun...based on the European-origin Sky Guard surface-to-air system." While the Al-Amoun system is not new, the test is the first since 2003 and was covered by local media. Kuwait also recently hosted an interagency Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection (CEIP) team to assess security vulnerabilities at its oil facilities (refs A and B).

KUWAIT 00000445 002 OF 002

But Kuwaitis Remain Skeptical

16. (S/NF) Despite these new security measures, many Kuwaitis remain skeptical about their military's ability to defend them in the event of an attack. Mahmoud Rizougi, a former senior military official responsible for training programs, told PolOff that Kuwait was woefully unprepared for any serious military confrontation. According to him, "Kuwait couldn't survive more than a few hours." Shaykh Mishal and many other Kuwaitis were similarly unimpressed with Kuwait's military preparedness (ref C). One text message circulated widely after the parade mockingly reported that Iran had stopped uranium enrichment after viewing this demonstration of Kuwait's military prowess. Dr. Shamlan Al-Issa, the Director of the Center for Strategic and Future Studies, said the parade demonstrated "wishful thinking,...a self-deceiving delusion that Kuwait is strong and can defend itself." Dr. Sami Al-Faraj, the Director of the Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies, told PolOff the parade was just an occasion for Shaykh Sabah to show off Kuwait's new Apache helicopters, and perhaps demonstrate a stronger Kuwaiti resolve on regional issues. He said four "senior military officers" he talked to all criticized the parade for distracting the military from more important issues. One officer noted that Iran would not be deterred from attacking Kuwait simply because it had a military parade.

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LeBaron